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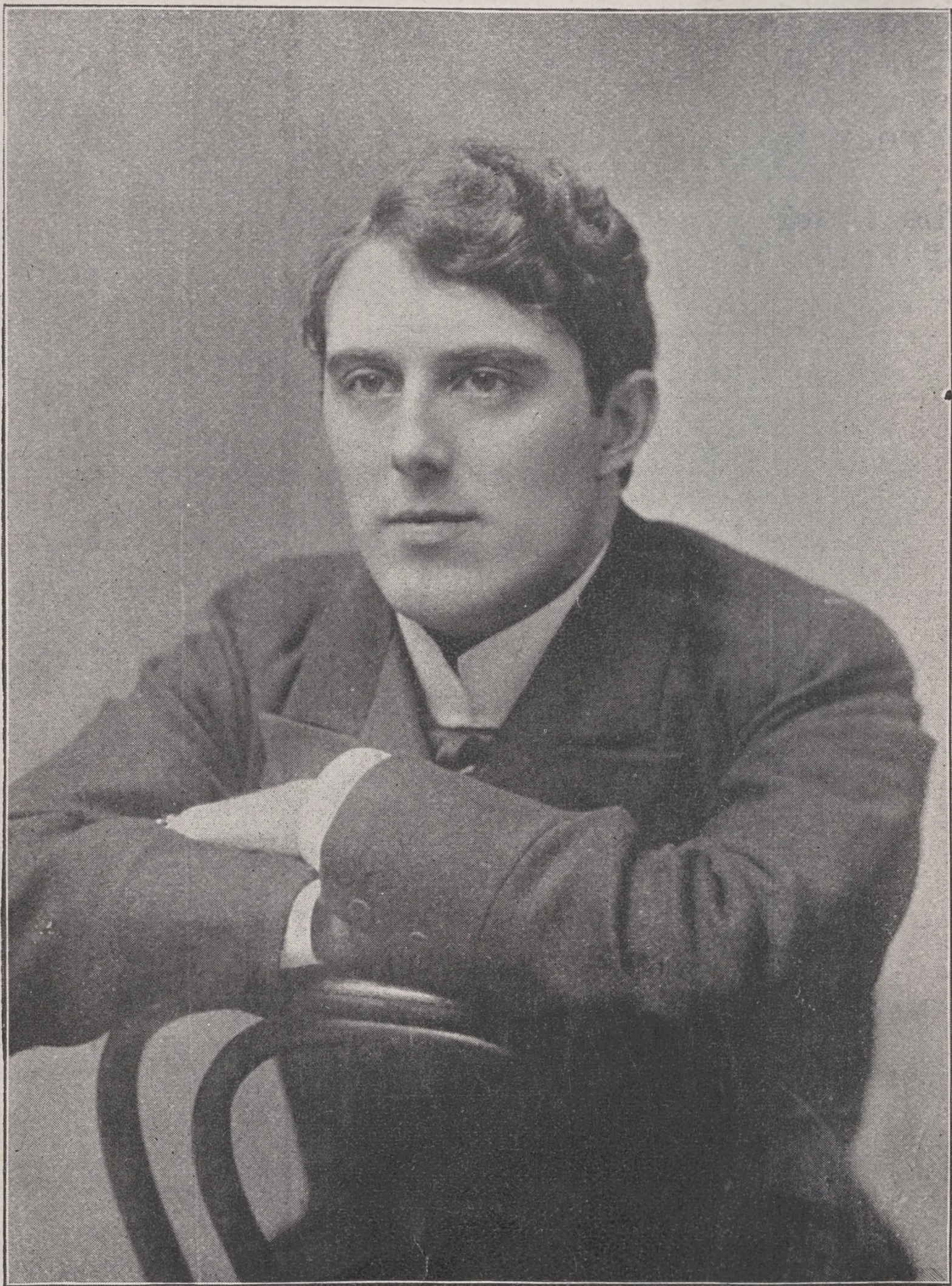
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CHEIRO.

THE HAND OF FATE

OR

A STUDY OF DESTINY

A NOVEL

BY

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Author of "The Language of the Hand," "If We Only Knew, and Other Poems," "The Guide to the Hand," Etc.



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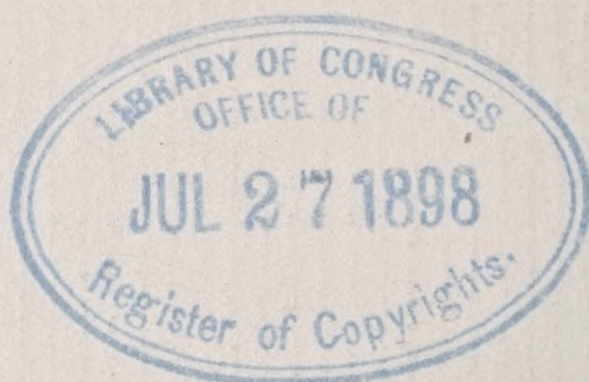
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FOREWORD

IN the autumn of 1896 many leading papers cited as an extraordinary instance of prenatal influence the case of a young Italian girl who was admitted to Bellevue Hospital, New York, with a peculiar animated growth at the left side of her neck, which had commenced to develop some years after her birth, and which could only be accounted for by a fright received by the mother some months prior to her birth. I have the details of this case with me while I write this introduction, but I refrain from giving them here on account of the similarity they bear to some portions of the following

story, which was, however, written a considerable time before the above-mentioned case was brought before the notice of the public.

As an example of the effect produced by the mind on the body due to prenatal impressions, I might mention a case some years ago in England of a well known lady, who seeing a beggar and her six children on her grounds, ordered her off with the remark, "Take your litter of pigs out of my sight." Whereupon the woman, who was really destitute and almost starving, in her anger knelt on the road and cried, "If there is a God in Heaven, then may the child you will bear be what you deem mine to be."

The woman's words and attitude, it is believed, produced a deep impression upon the lady, who about six months later gave birth to a little girl who, instead of a nose and mouth, *had a pig's snout*, and who as

long as she lived was fed out of a silver trough.

As another instance of the mind of the mother affecting the mind of the unborn child, I will mention *en passant*, the case of a boy in Boston, U.S.A., whose parent could neither read nor write, yet who had such a natural gift of calculation that at five years of age he was exhibited as an infant prodigy at Harvard University, where he gave correct answers to additions of five to seven columns of figures, three and four figures deep, after an instant's pause for reflection. As an explanation of this extraordinary faculty, it was shown that some months previous to his birth, his mother who was an expert at knitting, got a commission to make so many hundred pairs of socks at a certain price, and that she had occupied her attention almost night and day with trying to make the necessary calculation as to how

much yarn she would require for the task, and what would be her profit.

The story that appears in the following chapters was written long before the case of the Italian girl was brought before my notice, but it probably would never have appeared if her case had not excited attention, for without that parallel this story would most probably be considered merely a figment of morbid imagination.

There are some persons who will probably think the story too horrible to have ever been published. My answer to that is, that the crimes that are every day committed through ignorance—or worse still, through thoughtlessness—of such matters as hereditary and prenatal influences, are far more horrible than any story the imagination could invent. I have seen such terrible examples of heredity and wilful prenatal carelessness, that were it possible, I would write a story revealing

their criminality so that every syllable and word would be branded upon the memory of each reader, like living lines of warning that never could be forgotten.

It is at the doors of the religious bigot and hypersensitive purist that the charge will one day be laid of half the mental and physical deformities that fill the world with so much pain and misery, degradation and shame.

These are the people who close the lips of doctors while they erect a hospital for the very diseases produced by the ignorance they encourage, and seek to screen in silence. They beguile themselves into believing that they worship God—forgetting that the God of Knowledge knows no shame, and that the God of Nature is the same nature whether found in animals or men. These are the people who *curb Christianity with creeds*; who cannot admit good unless it issues from the portals of a

church, and that too of a certain denomination, with a certain dogma, ceremony and observance.

To them the words of Christ, "Those who are not against us are for us," can have no meaning, the freethinker is an outlaw in their eyes, even though he too builds a hospital, is an upright man, is a good master, and a helper, and a benefactor to his race.

Those who dare to raise their voice or their pen on this subject but in the orthodox way, these good folk have the power to taboo "not respectable," and no leper in the days of Israel could become more shunned than the so-called social leper who should have the misfortune to be thus tabooed. Occasionally, it is true, these conventional persons clean out a saloon, or drive the unfortunate of one street into another more obscure, but they will not strike at the root of the evil—an evil that

may exist in their own homes—in their loveless marriages sanctioned by state and church! Too often in their very religion they have forgotten the simple human Christ, and placed in His stead a Deity that must be approached with fear and trembling.

These people would be shocked if we told them they were superstitious—for will they not cause the arrest of a woman for telling cards, and he who reads the stars they fain would torture at the stake. But in their belief, the sun and moon stood still that some poor wretches might be slain; the movement of a star meant the discovery of Christ; their infants must be baptized with the thumb making the sign of the cross on the forehead and not with the first finger; and God must be approached with ceremonials based and built on superstition, but so they hold their own through the superstitious

element they fain would think so wicked, but which is the greater part of all men's lives and beliefs.

This anti-human idea of religion, however, removes the burden of the responsibility of individual action, that is pleasing to the majority of the masses, who if they do wrong can blame the devil, and if their children suffer through their fault, they can shirk their responsibility by placing it on the shoulders of God.

This is the creed that has done to humanity the greater harm of all, it but suits a mankind that is too selfish to change, a selfish mass that cheats its neighbour all the week and prays on Sunday for forgiveness, that first breaks its youth on the wheels of dissipation—and then craves to have children to perpetuate its name, or to inherit the money it cannot carry with it to the grave.

Is it any wonder, then, that while such

things exist, the world is filled on every side with pain, misery, dishonour, and degradation? *For the seeds that we sow must be reaped*, if not by us, well then, by those who will some day take our place. The destiny of mankind is the destiny of creation, whereby the smallest link of humanity is as important as the greatest in the part it plays in life's great chain; there is no escape from the destiny that has been made for us by the actions of the past.

For who can deny that the present is but the child of the past; and as the present must in its turn become the father of the future, I would endeavour to show that the great lesson of life should be the bettering and helping of the race who shall come after us. By the study of such natural laws as heredity and prenatal influences

* "The bond of past existences is strong."—SIR EDWIN ARNOLD.

and conscientious obedience to the same, I argue in the following story that, stern and relentless as Fate may be, *yet it is not altogether irrevocable*, but can only be changed by knowledge of those tendencies to evil and degeneration so far previous to the action that other laws may have time to operate and effect the would-be result.

Those who would fain argue against this idea of life, would do well to remember that in the last few years it has become the accepted theory of many brain specialists that there must be an advance growth in the brain before an idea or thought becomes the result. It is therefore possible that at twenty years of age, for example, there may germinate in one's brain some tendency that may ruin or exalt the life at forty, and that one may be all those years unconscious that such a change is taking place until the desire for the action makes one aware of the

tendency. It is thus we lay down rails as it were for the engine of action to run—but we lay these rails or tendencies in advance, and these I am convinced reach far beyond our lives, and commence the road of destiny for our posterity, who like ourselves will be too ignorant, or too careless, to think about those who must also follow.

In conclusion, if there are some who desire a more religious foundation for such ideas, what can be stronger, I ask, than those words that have become so familiar that we scarce think of their meaning, “I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, even unto the third and fourth generations”?

If the following story therefore, in spite of all its imperfections, can make even a few persons think a little more seriously over these laws that govern and control life, which may not be violated without

consequent penalties, such then will prove a sufficient excuse for my having given it to the world, and will speak more loudly in defence of my action than aught else that I can offer.

LEIGH DE HAMONG.



A Study of Destiny

CHAPTER I

IT was during the summer of 1889, that, accompanied by a rather antiquated archæologist, I found myself one morning trying to make a bargain with some Arabs for the use of a hut during our sojourn in El Karnak.

My companion was one of those extraordinary persons that one somehow expects to find travelling in a country like Egypt. He was a fragment of creation which refused to be ground by the wheel of life into the common mould of ordinary mortals.

By nationality he was a German, with an ancestry back to Noah, and with so

many years upon his head, that his heart no longer measured time with regularity, and kept in lieu of palpitation a kind of dog-trot march which the Angel of Death seemed to quietly ignore. By profession he was Professor of Archæology. He knew every stone in the Great Pyramids, and he seemed without doubt to be personally acquainted with every mummy ever embalmed from the days of Cheope down to our present era of cremation. He was an attaché to the Mummy Department of great Museums—a man who worked for work's sake, and not sordidly for gold ; and was so unusual in such matters, that people thought him quite mad, except of course when such insanity brought them more money than they could ever gain by the sanity of their own intellectual stupidity. His own country, “ Das Vaterland,” had not seen fit to recognize its child. It had many fossils, human and

otherwise, but it is probable that it placed such value on its French Antiquities, that it failed to see the virtue of a study of dead Egyptians. Hence he had sought England—England was partial to mummies—she built coffers and cases for them, fine museums for them, she paid wise looking professors to label them chronologically, and then squabble for ages over the authenticity of their names—and England welcomed him, and became his scientific refuge.

At various times he was brought before the notice of the Government by his services to the British Museum, and on one occasion his knowledge of Egyptian jewels and relics enabled him to trace by the sale of a rare collection of such treasures on the Continent, a tomb previously unknown to Egyptologists, which was being slowly and steadily robbed by a band of Arabs. For this service to

science any other man would probably have received a large reward, but in his case he was satisfied to be sent to Egypt in the worst part of the year to make arrangements for the future safe custody of the pillaged tomb. That work having been successfully accomplished, he turned his attention to the monuments of Thebes, and at the time my story opens, he had determined, single-handed and almost without capital, to search for evidence of another undiscovered tomb of unsurpassed magnificence which, he argued from certain data he had collected, existed in, or about Thebes.

As for myself, I had met the old man some years before in London, whilst dining one night in an old café close to the Museum. He was drawn to me by a ring that I wore. The ring had been found on the hand of a skeleton near Nineveh—a Persian relic consisting of three small

chiselled scarabs, representing the Devil, the World, and Eternity. He took a wax impression of the ring, and found out that the scarabs dated back to the Sassasian period of Persia. Through this little incident we became fast friends. It was little wonder then, when we found ourselves fellow travellers in Egypt, that he laid his plans before me, and I agreed to spend the rest of my time with him in his researches among dried up mummies, broken idols, and buried tombs.

We had decided to make our headquarters at El Karnak, and so it was that on the morning my story opens we found ourselves making a bargain for a domicile with a respectable Arab citizen almost in the same spirit as one would with a London landlady.

It will be sufficient for the purpose of this tale, to dwell only upon the points of interest bearing directly upon it, therefore

I refrain from detailing all minor experiences or elaborate descriptions of either El Karnak or Thebes.

On the morning after our arrival, fully equipped with a guide and all necessaries, we crossed the Nile and made our way towards that wonderful Valley of Death, the "Tombs of the Kings." It was scarcely dawn. There was only a long, luminous streak far away in the Eastern horizon sending out wide-spreading shafts of light like arrows to pierce the heart of departing night, driven hence like some fugitive before the fierce harbingers of the King of Day. Before us vaguely loomed a range of low hills, wrapped in that strange, chilling stillness that seems keenest about the hour preceding daybreak. In the jealous granite heart of the Necropolis were concealed the embalmed kings—kings perhaps before whom nations had trembled, and yet now their names are

scarce spoken. The accumulated drift of centuries covers their greatness. Their glory has passed like the vanished rays of yesterday's sun. They are worse off than the unrenowned dead, who are soon forgotten—Kings that they were, they are doomed to be the prey of undying curiosity. They are rooted out of their resting places—they are bought and sold as merchandise—they are put in glass cases to be stared at, to be mocking fun for the ignorant, to have their limbs exposed, their deeds written and their follies recorded. And yet, in spite of the lesson, modern man would fain be great—either a devil or a god in his ambitious forgetfulness of the future.

It is impossible to adequately describe the sombre grandeur, the impressiveness of the scene environing these tombs. One can scarcely keep the heart from dread, and the soul from awe, at the keen sense

of a desolation that enspells. On every side are crumbling ruins of catacombs and pompous monuments, solemn witnesses of past glory—sculptured sneers to the living—monitors no man heeds.

Here in this valley reigns a silence that contains within its stillness the elements of inarticulate eloquence, albeit the stones are tongueless, and the souls of the dead are voiceless spectres.

Away above the hills, one looks up to the limitless blue space of heaven, then back again to the darkness of the tombs, where sleep the Pharaohs—and the living heart quakes with fear, not of self, for self is as nothing here, but with a sense of that defiant mystery called life, and of that mystery of mysteries called death, that mortal seems so powerless to make, break, or control, and never yet solved.

Involuntarily we paused for a moment at the entrance. It seemed that here on the

very threshold everything animate and inanimate resented man's intruding footsteps.

A large bat flew out of one of the neighbouring tombs and blinded by the light, dashed against our faces, gave vent to a sordine scream, and wildly disappeared in the direction of the night.

We thought we were alone—the first in the early morning to venture amongst relics of kingly splendours in the sanctuary of the dead. And yet it was not so. Scarcely a hundred paces apart we discerned the figure of a man—a young man, whose senses seemed deaf to sound, as it were, entranced by the wonderful stillness that pervaded the mysterious place. There was something unusual in his personality that at once claimed our attention. It was not the fact of his being there alone at this early hour, although that in itself was unusual, for El Karnak at

this season of the year was deserted by tourists. There was a subtle something enveloping him. For are there not some persons whose atmosphere, whose every line and curve is the expression of their superior soul ; whereas, are there not others as devoid of expression, as devoid of this quality, as they are soulless ?

The stranger had taken off his cap, apparently in token of reverence in this ancient abode of the illustrious dead. As he stood there uncovered, one could not help noticing that his strongly marked and almost handsome face bore an expression of sadness and desolation that was strangely in keeping with the scene. Although an Englishman and in an ordinary tourist costume, there was something about him that harmonized with the weirdness of the valley and made him seem a part of the picture—a living example it might have been, of that

strange invisible power called cohesion, that one sees in the Destiny of Nations, and does not care to admit in the individual Destiny of Man.

We approached him, intending to make friendly overtures, but to our surprise with a peculiar expression of distrust, without returning our salutation he walked rapidly away towards a more distant tomb, and as if perfectly familiar with the place, he entered it and was lost to our view.

From our guide we learned that he had been in the vicinity some time; that he lived apart from everyone, and scarcely spoke to a human being unless circumstances forced him to do so. It was rumoured that he spent almost his entire time day and night, prowling about the ruins. His favourite haunt the Tombs of the Kings, where he was generally to be found. "But he is brave, brave as the lion," the guide went on to say, and then

he told us how, but a month since, this man had plunged into the Nile, and saved a little native girl from being crushed by the paddle wheel of a steamer—"but"—and the guide lowered his voice in a mysterious way—"there is one thing the Englishman is afraid of," and with a writhing gesture of the hand, and emitting a sharp hiss, we knew that the stranger had some extraordinary fear of *a snake*.

We had reached the entrance of one of the large tombs, and the old professor forgot everything else in the enthusiasm of his work. By chance probably we had struck a tomb that was exactly in accordance with a chart he had carefully worked out, and his old face lighted up with joy, and became young again with the promised realization of one of his pet dreams.

During moments of great excitement, it was his habit to produce a little German pipe, and softly croon to himself as he

rubbed and polished it with the sleeve of his old-fashioned black coat. On this occasion the bowl of the little veteran was polished till it shone like ebony, and I am certain that the sleeve of any other man's coat would have caught fire through the vigorous friction. With pride the professor confided to me that he had worn that same coat at his work for over twenty years. How it stood the wear is beyond my comprehension. In colour it was a rusty black, very shiny but very clean, for the professor had the peculiar knack of looking spick and span under all conditions. Even after a long tramp across the desert, I have seen him turn up at the finish without a hair out of place, and a freshness about his beardless face that would delude one into the belief that he had just made his toilet. He never ceased to taunt me over "the misfortune of having a heavy growth of beard," and

exulted that Providence had spared him. I think he would have begrudged the five minutes required to shave, and waxed profane over the interruption to his work.

Although he had attained his seventieth year, he was agile and alert as a boy. True, he wore spectacles, but then one naturally does not expect a professor without them, particularly not an erudite Egyptologist. His gold-rimmed spectacles—his one extravagance—lent to his face a guise of profound learning that even seemed to impress our Arab guide, for the rascal did not attempt to impose upon us the usual yarns and lies which are as a rule launched upon tourists. He simply pointed out the places and objects of interest with a long, lean finger, and waited for the professor to explain.

We went from crypt to crypt, until at last the day came to an end, and we returned to our hut.

The professor was extremely pleased with his first day's work, but very suspicious of the Arab who had accompanied us. After our meagre supper as we sat chatting together, he pointed out to me many doubtful things in the Arab's behaviour. One instance in particular, when we had followed a passage, until it led us into a small chamber where the Arab had become positively insolent, because the professor insisted on tarrying to closely examine its formation. Cunning as the Arab was, he had not calculated on the tenacity of the man he had to deal with. Professor Von Heller had come to Thebes to fathom *something*, and neither a stone wall nor a horde of inimical Arabs would have in the slightest degree turned him aside, once he had arrived at the conclusion that it was his duty, in the interest of science, to proceed.

He determined, however, that we would

go unattended to pursue our exploration on the following day, and his last words were to caution me to supply myself with plenty of matches: "For," he said, with a smile, "it is the custom of these tricky dogs, when an independent tourist refuses their guidance, to creep after him, and blow out his torch in the most bewildering part of the crypts; thinking that after he has spent a gruesome night in the society of mummies he will be only too willing to pay for guides in the future."



CHAPTER II

IT was scarcely dawn when the professor, already dressed, awoke me, and informed me in his quiet, insistent way, that it was time to get up. Lazily and drowsily I complied. Whilst dressing, the voices of two men talking in Arabic in a half-whisper outside my window attracted my attention. I recognized one as our guide of yesterday, and the other as our Arab servant, who, by honest right, at that moment should have been preparing our breakfast. Something in the tones of the guide's voice—although I could not understand a word he said—impressed me with

the idea that my companion and myself were the subjects of conversation.

Just at this juncture, the professor re-entered the room ; instantly, his attention was also caught by the suspicious undertone of the voices. He understood Arabic. Giving me a sign of silence, he quickly crept to the window to listen. He jotted down in his ubiquitous note book every word, while a benign smile of satisfaction rose like a Nile moon over his face. In a few moments the conversation stopped, the guide departed, and our Arab servant, in the most acceptable broken English, announced breakfast.

Over our frugal meal, the professor confided to me that his suspicions of the previous day were too well founded. From the guide's words he had learned that we had been suspected of trying to find out too much, and that our Arab servant had been warned to give no information whatever

in any way relating to the tombs. From the trend of their conversation there was no longer any doubt left in the professor's mind, not only that there was a tomb unrevealed, but that it was the most valuable quarry of all, and contained large quantities of jewels and relics. It was a concerted plan of the Arabs who knew the secret, to pillage it when an auspicious opportunity offered. Exactly what their attitude would be towards us when they found out that we had dispensed with their services, the professor had not gathered. The servant had been simply warned to look out for his own interests, as someday we probably would not return.

I must confess I felt a bit anxious as we made preparations to start. The professor had told me all kinds of stories, about torches being blown out in difficult passages, and people starving to death before their absence was discovered. But the

genial old soul somewhat reassured me by saying, "I have prepared for such an emergency, and can foil even an Arab's cupidity," at the same time producing from his traveller's hold-all, two folding lanterns with dark slides and a small can of oil that he quietly slipped into his pocket.

Once more we started, and in order to divert the suspicion of the Arabs, we visited various other points of interest, before directing our steps towards the place we planned to reach. Barring the young Englishman, we were the only strangers in the vicinity. The season was far advanced, and every one who could had fled to escape the intense heat. As for the stranger with the sad face, he was seldom to be seen. Occasionally we encountered him in passing through labyrinths leading from tomb to tomb, but each time he appeared deliberately to avoid us. We noticed that all the Arabs

seemed to have some superstitious fear of him ; they never went near him on any pretext, and even the little children, who usually beset every stranger for alms, crept away and left him alone. From his appearance and dress he was a gentleman, yet one could not see him without wondering at the nameless shadow that seemed always hanging about him—a shadow of gloom, of despair, of melancholy, of foreboding that it would be impossible to depict. One felt it.

When at last we reached the point where we had discontinued our investigations on the previous day, the professor lighted the lanterns, and without a word plunged forward into the all-encompassing darkness of the subterranean approaches to the more remote tombs. Occasionally he stopped and flashed the light on some piece of carving or inscription upon the walls, and I noticed at the beginning of

every passage he carefully examined the left-hand side, and taking some wax from his leather geologist's satchel, he would take impressions of a small cypher or character that had completely escaped my notice. At first I thought that his object in making such observations was simply precautionary that we might be able to retrace our footsteps; but a little later he explained to me that in his enthusiasm he had not for a moment entertained a thought of danger; he had simply discovered some cypher that was not found in any of the other tombs, and which, he considered, was an important clue to the tomb of which he was in search.

Up to that moment we had not heard anything of the Arabs, nor were we molested in any way. But just when I had about overcome my apprehensions, the professor turned the dark slide of his lantern, and quietly drew me into a narrow niche hewn

in the solid wall. The sudden darkness was intense ; our eyes unable to adjust themselves reflected again and again the brilliant colourings of some of the figures and inscriptions we had seen in the light. The stillness was almost maddening, but suddenly it was broken by a slight pattering shuffle, and we became conscious of the naked body of an Arab crawling past us like a snake. It was some time before we ventured out, and when we did, it was to retrace our steps and return home for the day.

The professor spent the rest of the afternoon in arranging the different impressions he had taken. He placed them carefully according to the drawing he had made of the tombs, and when he had them symmetrically fitted, he called me to his side, and pointed out with a grim look of satisfaction, that every one of the marks led direct to that portion of the tomb

where our guide had lost his temper on the day before. "And yet," the professor said, and he rubbed the little black pipe with a new vigour, "I would swear, after my examination yesterday, that there is nothing there but solid rock."

Just at this moment the young Englishman came up the street, and passed the doorway. He looked towards us, and that indescribable something in his face so attracted the professor that he forgot alike his chart and the wax impressions, and stepping to the door, watched the stranger go towards the ruins of the Temple of El Karnak. When the old man turned back to his charts, it was to think and not to work. His old withered hands listlessly pushed the wax impressions at random across the paper, even the little black pipe was forgotten, and I could see that the human mystery embodied in the person of the young man had a greater claim on his

heart, than even that of time and Thebes which he had so determined to unearth.

Watching him sit there I gradually fell asleep in my chair, and after a long refreshing nap, I woke to find it near midnight, and the old man yet wrapt in profound meditation in the same position. Wishing to divert his thoughts, I touched him on the shoulder and suggested a walk before turning in for the night. He started at my touch, and assented by simply putting on his hat and mechanically following me out into the silent street.

We wandered aimlessly in the direction of the ruins of El Karnak. It was such a night as one can see only in Egypt, and that, too, but during certain seasons of the year. The stillness of death seemed to reign perpetually about this place; there was no breeze, no sound of man or beast—everything on earth seemed painfully hushed, while in the heavens a large pallid

moon hung like the ghost of some dead world unrested and alone.

The heat was intense, a dull torrid heat that rose in filmy waves from the desert, that parched the lips, that swelled the veins like the kiss of a fever when one's strength is gone. The low whitewashed huts around the ruins were silent and grim. What insignificant kennels they were in the shadow of those majestic columns and sculptures, magnificent and stately, even in their dilapidation and decay! One could imagine the closed eyelids, the parted lips, the distorted limbs those squalid huts covered from the sky—covered, yes! that the spectres of the moonlight might not mock the miserable descendants of the past. Without uttering a word, we traversed court after court, gazed up at the massive pillars that rose like giants towards the unbroken silence of the sky. On every side were ruins, but

what ruins!—majesty, grandeur, intellect, superb intellect—had designed and erected these monuments that even time's voracious teeth had failed to totally destroy—verily fitting sepulchres for kings.

Was it then indeed a wonder that those who had built these stupendous monuments to endure through centuries in witness of their mundane glory, their giant prowess, sought to preserve against the cruel ravages of time their dead, by swathing in bands of linen and embalming spices the hands that imperiously held sceptres or toiled, and the heads that devised or that ruled, and the bodies they had worshipped, hoping that they might also endure, if they could not live for ever?

And yet what vanity, for mortals to strive to cope with and thwart the inevitable—the law of Destiny—they could not keep the dead from decay, nor their temples from crumbling, nor their dynasties

from devastation of usurpers. Strange and humiliating it is to our own era that we of to-day, have learned so little from the lessons of the past. Their religions are dead — their gods are broken — their dilapidated temples but monuments to folly. The mummies with all their spiced wrappings are powdered into dust, and more repulsive still, some worms have been cheated, while others have been fed like vampires. And yet, we with our boasted civilization, with our creeds and Christianities, we are consumed by a vanity that I question is not greater than theirs. We make no more gods of stone, but we make others less tangible—gods of ideas, gods of theories, gods that leave no visible ruins, except in the betrayed hearts of those who once were worshippers. Our various religions have built temples, it is true, but not like the temples of past faiths. We have no longer time to chisel

the pictured story of our era thereupon, and we count, alas, their glory in the richness of their revenue. We make no visible sacrifices of blood and flesh—no, but in our selfishness and ambitious strife our paths are strewn with more damning sacrifices. We substitute creeds for deeds—creeds that torture, that shackle, and blunt our consciences—that make us slaves to the egotism of some man-god, that in the end change and are futile and leave us wrecked and stranded in our disillusion.

And yet the law of Life and Death goes on the same—the flowers of the field bloom to fade and so do we. Children come and go as the buds on the trees, they laugh, they play, they look bright as the flowers, but like the flowers, they are hardly conscious of the inherited worm of disease that comes creeping to their heart's core, to blight and destroy them.

Yet do we pay tribute to shrines—we pray to this saint, and that god, but the canker increases, we suffer, and the end comes. It is only when confronting a supreme moment that we realize how terrible, how inevitable is Destiny—only when we are helpless—when we are stunned by a something we cannot resist—then in half-cowardice the head is bowed, and the lips murmur, “Thy will be done,” and yet the soul is in rebellion. Too late, too late!

We would disallow and cavil with the righteousness of the claim on man of that Destiny we recognize in nations—we would place ourselves on a pinnacle, and dream we see all because we see a little. Poor pigmies that we are, we say we will control when we are the controlled—the very most servants who obey without knowing the meaning of obedience. To pacify ourself each one makes an imagery of God to refuge his own irresponsibility.

We feel dominated by the Infinite Who creates us, endows our being with thoughts, and feelings, and conscience, and spirit. Yet we fain do not imitate. We were born to reproduce and perfect our own species, see how woefully do we fulfil our mission—we transgress the God-given laws of nature, then idiotically wonder at their imperfections and cruelty when the inexorable penalties are exacted. In these transgressions we are worse than brutes. For we know evil, yet resist good. And yet, the world goes on, seed-time and harvest come and go. Nations rise and fall, and so do men, but they reckon not what they sow in seed-time, or reap "*what they have not sowed.*" The inscrutable law of Destiny is above all, around all, and in all, *is all*. It encompasses the beginning and the end—it is Truth and Falsehood—the good and the evil and the consequences that follow. It is God the Infinite, man

the finite—and love and good which is the mystery that conceals the purpose.

* * *

As I stood beneath those gigantic structures of the past, these thoughts ran through my brain. For the first time I fully realized the littleness of man and the greatness of that controlling law of Destiny which has been worshipped for centuries under so many names. I turned to my old friend, and was surprised to find that the effect on him had been similar. One could read on his face his soul's surprise—see the breakdown of old ideas and orthodox beliefs. But, we had not learned the lesson. We had but opened the covers of the book. Men, like children, are fond of pictures. In a moment we would see one, an illustration, an etching from Fate's pencil, to be for ever engraven upon our hearts.

We had been advancing in silence towards the centre of that great "Hall of Columns," where the broken portion of the roof has still remained, when we were startled by a low sob that seemed to come from a corner of the ruins where the gathered shadows, even in daylight, are sombre and almost impenetrable.

It was more than a sob—it was a moan from behind clenched teeth—a moan that seemed more than human in its intensity—until it became the voice of pain that dashed itself from pillar to pillar, that echoed in our ears and chilled the hot blood that but a moment before was coursing through our veins. We stood rooted to the spot, possessed by a terror that is indescribable. We looked at one another, but our blanched faces frightened us in the light of the pallid moon that covered all with its ghostly shimmer. The awful silence that followed the cry seemed more than I could

bear—I could hear the blood surging up my throat, singing past my ears, and stealing in upon my brain till every nerve and muscle grew paralyzed with fear. Again we heard that heart-rending cry, and in our excited senses we saw it—saw it in a thousand shapes and forms, crossing from under the shattered roof, breaking itself against the stone idols and broken gods, and moaning an anguish in our ears that made our very hearts stand still as we hearkened.

There could no longer be any doubt ; it was the cry of a soul in agony. Not an ordinary soul, but one of those sensitive, yet strong souls that shut themselves in with their sorrows, that cry only in the silence of the night when there is no one to share the Gethsemane of their anguish. Instinctively we started forward to help—to console, to do anything, in fact, to keep that sound from being repeated. But we

had scarcely moved our feet in the soft sand, when from out of the shadows there appeared the apparition of a young man, the very man who had so often occupied our thoughts—whose mournful but handsome face we had remarked on our first arrival. Slowly, but with firm steps, he crossed to the centre and then stood still—still as the huge idol that lay across his path. His hair was thrown back from his brow, and his strong, manly face, marked by pain and gloom, stood out in bold relief against the enormous pillars that flanked him. His loose English shirt was open from throat to waist, while his hands were clutched on his breast as if ready to tear his heart out and dash it against the stones.

As he stood there, he seemed to look upward into the very eyes of Heaven; he was more than a man for the moment, he was a god, *questioning the mercy of a*

Greater. But suddenly his whole appearance changed ; he seemed to writhe with pain, and pressing his hands still tighter over his heart, he clenched his teeth to keep back the cry that even then was again rising from his very soul. He battled with it, but the agony was too great. It burst from him—burst through his clenched teeth, and with a moan like that of a hunted, wounded animal, he staggered forward and fell across the idol, as one dead.

In a second the old professor was leaning over the prostrate form, and with the tenderness of a woman he brushed the great drops of perspiration from the brow, rubbed the cold hands that lay motionless, and as there were no signs of life, he looked up anxiously at me, and then back again at the body lying there as inanimate as the broken idol at his side. But there was motion—a motion that caused us to

almost hold our breath with suspense—there was something on the breast under the thin silk shirt that moved—something that somehow like a presentiment of evil, filled us with dread and dismay. Involuntarily I too had drawn near the sufferer, and put out my hand to raise the folds of the shirt. As I did so, I touched something that made me gasp with terror, something so horrible, so ghastly, that even now as I write, I can vividly recall the sensation. My hand had come in contact with a cold clammy something that lived there—it had moved under my touch, writhed, as if it were in torment. I looked closely. There was the head of a snake, with sightless eyes quivering beneath my fingers! One glance was sufficient, I staggered back and dropped senseless from the shock that my good friend thought would there and then prove fatal—but, resulted in making me keep my bed for weeks.

CHAPTER III

WHEN I recovered consciousness I found myself alone with my old companion. With the greatest difficulty after this hideous episode he got me back to our abode, but days and even weeks passed before he mentioned what had happened after I lost consciousness. At last, one evening he told me that just as I fell, the stranger had revived and opened his eyes, and with a surprised, terrified look he hastily pulled his coat together over his breast, sprang to his feet and without one word disappeared among the ruins.

Even then, the professor would not credit what I averred I had seen. It was in vain that I tried to convince him. Finally, thinking to humour me he said, that such an eccentric individual might probably carry as a pet a snake, such as I described.

One night, as we sat talking the strange occurrence over, the individual in question came slowly towards our hut. For a moment we imagined he was going to speak to us—there seemed a glad look in his eyes on seeing me again—but instead of speaking, he slowly raised his cap, bowed, and passed on, once more in the direction of the ruins of El Karnak.

The professor was very pleased to get even that recognition. He had made up his mind that the mysterious individual would some day, in some way be instrumental in giving the key to the secret that he so earnestly desired to solve. He

could give no actual reason for his conclusion, except that he felt that such would be the case. By some undefined intuitive force, his soul had already come in touch with the possibilities of the future. He felt confident of it, and yet, although it was his earnest desire, the assurance of the knowledge brought no happiness. Perhaps, his soul gazing into the future saw such trials and sufferings that it deemed the price too great for all it had to learn and irrevocably must endure.

My convalescence warranted our resuming our work at Thebes. Every morning we would cross the Nile, and sometimes not return to our hut till late at night. Again and again we met our strange friend in our wanderings, but he always appeared to avoid us; even the genial professor was gradually coming to the conclusion that we might as well try and form a speaking acquaintance with the Sphinx,

when through a very simple incident, one morning the barrier was broken. How often it is so in life—when we have ceased to plan, we become successful.

For a long time the professor had been engaged in taking impressions from certain hieroglyphics he had found on the murals of the passages. By subsequently putting the segments together, he discovered that they formed a key, and by this he proceeded to make his way from passage to passage. On the day in question, however, he was baffled completely by what really seemed to be a simple character. The old man had tried again and again to make the sections fit, in order that he might be enabled to go on with his conceived plan. But there was something wrong, and after trying over and over again, he at last gave up the task, with a sigh of real despair. At that moment, however, the stranger

stepped towards us from one of the passages. He seemed to take in the whole difficulty at a glance, and raising his hat to the professor he said, "Sir, if you will allow me, I will show you what is wrong." Without waiting for a reply he re-arranged the sections, and in a few seconds the difficulty was solved.

The professor's gratitude knew no bounds. He expressed himself in both German and English in the same breath, and was only checked when the stranger said quietly, "You are only at the beginning; you have not yet solved the difficulty." But the hope in the old man's heart was hard to kill. With gratitude and satisfaction, he again shook the young man's hand and turned to resume his work.

The stranger disappeared almost as quickly as he had come. But the ice had been broken, and the professor looked

forward with joyful expectation to another meeting. He rubbed his hands with delight, as he thought how he had intuitively divined from the first, that this strange individual possessed the secret of which he was in quest. He pointed out to me with what perfect ease he had arranged the sections, a thing impossible without a previous knowledge of the meaning of the cyphers. "But where do your figures lead to, after all?" I enquired. The old man pointed to the odd-looking chart of cyphers before him. "The last one, that must contain the secret," he said, "is according to this, formed by the combination of the first seven symbols. We must be close to it here—let us look for it." So saying he picked up one of the lanterns and started forward. We were indeed close to the end. A few paces brought us to the same small chamber that we had visited on our

first day with the guide, and to my amazement, we beheld, carved in the centre of the roof, the curious looking symbol for which we sought, and was the counterpart of the one on the chart. With a look of satisfaction and triumph, the old man gave vent to his feelings by executing what, I am sure, he must have intended for a German version of a Highland fling. But the temperature of Egypt was not suited to such vigorous gymnastics, and the result was a quick collapse of the aged and honorable professor.

As soon as he had recovered from his exertions, he proceeded to examine the curious symbol. He could not interpret it as far as language was concerned, but he had no great difficulty in making out that, although having a distinct character of its own, it was in reality made up of the first seven signs. And yet he could not

disguise the fact that he was no nearer the solution than before. It was true he had discovered something strange, something not discovered by other archæologists. But, after all, it was only a curious piece of carving in an empty chamber—a cypher without a solution, a door perhaps, without a key. It was in vain, he tried the walls for some opening or secret passage, in vain also that with his hammer he rapped on the floor, and the roof. All sounded the same. He but aroused echoes—echoes that mocked his hopes—echoes that died away in space and left him in despair.

It was a long time before he could bring himself to acknowledge that he was completely baffled, after all those days and weeks of toilsome research. He had sedulously worked up to the point when the signs he had discovered were obviously finger-posts, to guide through all those

puzzling labyrinths, and subterranean passages, and that a sign made up of seven cyphers, if found, would undeniably be the open sesame to that secret tomb, the El Dorado of his dreams. Alas! the mysterious symbol, the coveted heptagon, was found in the most insignificant chamber, a mere blind room scarcely ten feet square, built of Thebian marble, marked by no other sign, word or hieroglyphic, except, that one strange carving in the centre. Yet the point of entrance to the great tomb, if any existed, remained inexorably hidden. Under great stress the old man once more searched every portion of the masonry, and his little faithful hammer noisily interrogated its surfaces. No use. I could see his eyes brim with tears, as he prepared to depart. He did not speak until we reached our hut and as he bade me good-night, I knew from the dejected tone of his voice that,

for the first time in his life, he had altogether lost heart.

On the following morning, however, with renewed pluck, we started as before, again reached the catacombs, found the passages we had threaded the previous day, and after some difficulty once again we occupied the little chamber marked by that one significant symbol of seven. Again and again, the professor with his indefatigable pertinacity, tried by every means in his knowledge and power, to see if he could not wrest from these solid walls any clue to the secret passage that might lead to the goal, he hoped against hope to attain. Hour after hour passed without promise; the solid blocks of granite piteously echoed back, again and again, the metallic blows of his hammer, unrelentlessly refusing to yield their secret, until at last, worn out and exhausted, the poor professor threw himself down on the

slabs, and abandoned himself for the moment to disappointment and despair. I could not bear to stay and be a witness of his grief, so I took my lantern, and made off into one of the adjacent passages on a little exploration tour of my own. I was careful to keep to the one passage, not daring to venture by myself into others, fearful I should get lost in their intricate labyrinths. I had scarcely gone any distance, when my foot struck against the naked body of an Arab, who was crawling away from the chamber in which I had left the professor. The man had evidently been surreptitiously listening to every word we had said, and in the one glance I got at his face, I recognized him as one of the gang from which on the first morning we had selected our guide. Fully expecting him to spring at me from the darkness, I quickly drew my revolver; but instead of attacking me, he mockingly

laughed, and cursed all Christians as he made away and disappeared. Hastily retracing my steps after this occurrence, I was surprised and considerably startled to hear voices issuing from the chamber where I had left the professor alone. I rushed forward to protect him if need be, but, to my amazement, instead of finding him surrounded by villainous Arabs, I found him in the centre of the chamber, energetically shaking both hands of the young man who had already commanded so much of our attention, and profusely thanking him.

On my approach, my old friend, with voice trembling through emotion, told me in a few words, that the stranger had come of his own free will to act as our guide, and had offered to show us the very tomb we were in search of, which he and a few Arabs only knew.

“Yes,” said the stranger, turning to the

professor, "I will show you what you seek. Often have I desired to reveal my knowledge of the secret, but have waited until I could impart it to someone who would realise its historic and scientific value, and not regard it simply as a *treasure trove* to be pillaged. For this reason, I have, unobserved by you, watched you at work. I have even heard the words you have spoken to your friend. To-day, I have been so touched by your overwhelming disappointment, I could no longer refrain from telling you the thing you have toiled so faithfully to achieve, is now close at your hand. Do not thank me. Under different conditions, I probably would have used my present knowledge for my own advantage. The honour of the discovery would, however, be useless to me at this point of my calamitous career. But come, we have no time to waste in words—there is also danger in our being seen together,

particularly in this place. Meet me to-night at the entrance to this crypt, and I will gladly reveal all to you."



CHAPTER IV

WHEN night fell, faithful to the young man's instructions, we crossed the river from El Karnak to join him at the entrance to the tombs. I have often wondered since, why it was that both the professor and myself, were more than usually impressed with the sweetness of the outside world. As we walked down that silent, mysterious valley to the "Tombs of the Kings" over and over again we instinctively remarked the brilliancy of the stars, the radiance of the moonlight, whereas, the lower we descended into the valley, the more we seemed to shrink from the task that lay before us. Whatever could it portend?

The hills that hid the resting-place of kings rose dark and sinister in the silence of the night and cut sharply against the sky. The entrance to the tombs now looked like black hungry mouths—vampire mouths—yawning for the bodies of the living or the dead, while the very air seemed to thrill with presentiments that we felt, but could not understand. During the latter part of our journey we did not speak, and it was a veritable relief, when at last we discerned our strange friend pacing to and fro before the appointed place of meeting.

His explicit instructions had been to carry no lighted lanterns, or do anything that might attract the attention of the Arabs, as we passed through El Karnak. We were also cautioned to guard well that we were not followed, and, the first question our new friend asked was, if we had been observed. We replied in the negative

—as far as we knew, we had got through unseen. Having satisfied himself that there were no Arabs skulking about the tombs, his caution dictated that we must all creep on our hands and knees, until we got some distance underground, before we lit our lanterns.

It was thus we started, our strange guide first, then the professor, and lastly myself. Slowly and noiselessly we went deeper and deeper into the tomb. At every turning, our guide waited for us, and led us safely from one passage into another. The darkness was intense, and the heat and closeness almost insufferable. The only noise that broke the silence, was when occasionally we disturbed some large bat, and heard the whisk of his black wings, as he flew past us and disappeared. Once we thought we heard voices behind us, but having waited some time without a recurrence of the sound, we came to the

conclusion that our strained senses had deceived us, and cautiously proceeded.

At last our companion deemed it safe to light the lanterns, and with their help we soon reached the small chamber with the strange, mysterious symbol of seven.

Turning to the professor, our companion said, "Now, sir, you see that I have followed exactly the same route that you so carefully, and wonderfully worked out by those characters that you discovered. All your calculations were right up to this point, yet, it would have been impossible for you to have gone further by calculation, unless, by some lucky chance you had hit upon the secret. The Egyptians have always been famous for their intricate architectural devices. It will never cease to be the wonder of the world as to how the colossal stones that form the Pyramid of Cheops were ever placed in position. But what will you think, when I tell you

that the wonder of this chamber is that one of its entire stone walls is in reality a swing-door, and a door, too, that the strength of a child might open, provided that the child knew the secret?"

So saying he looked upward at the strange symbol in the centre of the roof, and then following a certain angle, he placed his left foot in a slight mark of wear on the rock at his feet. With his right hand he barely touched one side of the wall, when to our astonishment, the entire side of the chamber swung round on its axis, leaving an opening on either side by which a person might easily pass through. We wistfully entered, and found ourselves in a chamber exactly corresponding to the one we had left.

Our companion went through the same process he had to open the wall, and with a slight noise the huge stone swung back into its place.

Passing through this chamber, we reached a narrow passage, which, in its turn, led us to the inside of an inverted cone, down whose sloping sides we were preparing to descend, when our companion called our attention to a huge block of stone resting on the edge of the cone, and balanced in such a way that the slightest touch would send it crashing to the bottom. "That stone," he said, "was placed there simply as a seal when the occasion required it; once it falls," he said slowly, "the tomb below will be sealed for ever."

In descending, we had to go round and round the cone, exactly like following the spiral threads of an immense screw. In doing this, we were forced to pass under the enormous stone several times, and I found it impossible to do so without experiencing a shudder of fear, lest it might be dislodged and fall. At last we reached the base of the cone, and stopped

for a moment under a small arch, lost in amazement at the sight that greeted our eyes. We were standing on the threshold of the entrance of an immense tomb, larger even than that of the King's Chamber at Gizeh. It was of great height, and built in the shape of a seven-sided pyramid. The walls, floor, and roof were of polished Thebian marble, that reflected, and magnified in every direction the puny light of our lanterns. The bodies of seven mummies lay on raised stone platforms at the seven points of the chamber, and were so arranged, that the echo that was made by the mural of the chamber, at each point where the seven bodies lay, seemed to repeat the slightest whisper from one mummy to the other until, after circling round the seven, it ended where it started with redoubled volume.

It was the professor who unconsciously was the first to evoke this astonishing

acoustic phenomenon. He had lingered an instant longer than had we, at the entrance, absolutely spell-bound. Reverently the old man had taken off his well-worn straw hat, and as he did so there fell from his lips, "Oh, God! How wonderful! how wonderful!" Mummy after mummy appeared to repeat the words, and as the seventh loudly emitted them, the old man clutched my arm for support, whilst his trembling lips involuntarily repeated the litany accepted of the dead—and again, this weird, mysterious echo, swung round the strange circle until it rebounded back to the professor, then floated upwards towards the roof and died away.

The effect in the sepulchral stillness prevailing here, can be more easily imagined than described. A sensation of awe, and reverence for the mighty dead completely possessed us. As we stood there, our modern race seemed made up of

pigmies, our vaunted inventions as naught compared with the intellect and science of those dead Egyptians who had planned and erected all these marvellous structures.

But alas! what a sight of pillage and of vandalism was revealed to us as we proceeded!

Every sarcophagus had been burst open, except one, and even it had not quite escaped violation by the Arabs or probably earlier races who had invaded this wonderful crypt. Most of the mummies had been ruthlessly rifled. The linen bandages that had swathed the mummies had been indecently stripped completely off some, but more frequently they had been simply wrenched off the breasts, and the jewels and relics taken. Whoever the marauders had been, everywhere was evidenced extreme, reckless haste. Jewels and rings were scattered here and there

on the floor, as though a whirlwind had swept over the place, and close to the entrance was the skeleton of a full-grown man, who had fallen with his avaricious hands full of jewels, and perished as he had fallen. The posture, and appearance, and proximity to the entrance, told its own tale—he had evidently been surprised, or overtaken by some calamity, and tried to escape with simply what he could grab, and red-handed, for some unaccountable reason had fallen, never again to rise.

The unopened sarcophagus was the special object of interest to the professor. It stood apart from the others making up the seven, and occupied a position of distinction, almost in the centre of the tomb. It was unlike the others in shape, and was unembellished by any Egyptian characters, except one curious symbol, which the professor examined with avidity. Taking some tracings from his pocket, he

scrutinized and compared with the symbol. At last, looking up triumphantly, he said, much agitated by his excitement :

“ If what I think I have found here proves true, this will be the most valuable discovery of any heretofore made in connection with the history of Ancient Egypt.” Growing more calm, he explained that the greatest puzzle to all Egyptologists had been, and to the present moment still was, the empty sarcophagus found in the Great Pyramid — the Pyramid of Cheops. He then in a few words told us that amongst the writings of Diodorous, in his description of the Pyramids dealing with the period of Cheops, he had clearly written :—“ ‘ Although this king had intended this Pyramid for his sepulchre, yet it happened that he was never buried there For the people, being exasperated by reason of the toilsomeness of the work, threatened to tear in pieces

his dead body, and with ignominy throw it out of the sepulchre ; whereupon, when dying, he commanded his friends to bury him in another place.' ”

“ This curious sign,” continued the professor, “ is exactly similar to one found in the Great Pyramid, amongst the inscriptions relating to the First Dynasty ; therefore, it is not illogical to conclude that this sarcophagus, before us, contains none other than the lost mummy of Cheops. We must return to-morrow,” the professor was just saying—and simultaneously with the last words a slight, yet ominous sound startled us.

It might have been imperceptible, but for the echo of the tomb. It was at most only a slight sound, but one that struck terror to our hearts and sent a cold shiver through every nerve and vein. It came from the opening of the great cone through which we had passed. This was sufficient

to tell us that we had been betrayed, and that in another second we would face a doom too terrible to even imagine.

Instinctively we rushed towards the opening by which we had entered. Too late! A mocking, fiendish laugh warned us of our danger. The next moment there was a low rumbling sound, and then a deafening crash that resounded like a thousand cannon about our ears. We realized that the stone had fallen and the opening was sealed for ever!

CHAPTER V

I WILL not dwell upon our feelings, it will be sufficient to trust to the imagination of the reader, to portray what agony the mere idea of being incarcerated, buried alive, would create. The greater the loss, the more quietly oftentimes it is borne, and it is the same, I expect, under pressure of any very great shock. The surprise of any new situation, be it misfortune or success, often robs the mind for the moment of its anxiety. The old professor, who twelve hours before had almost cried like a child when baffled in his purpose, now when face to face with such a terrible doom, was apparently as calm

as if at that moment he was simply pursuing his daily work in the Mummy Department of the British Museum. In fact, the little German pipe even made its appearance—but not to be rubbed till it shone like ebony. Ah no! just to be fondly held with nervous fingers, as if two long-time friends were about to part.

As for our new companion, he said very little, but what he did say revealed in agonized tones the torture he was undergoing, for the terrible misfortune, he had unintentionally brought upon us. He would not rest until he had tried every possible plan of escape. But what escape could there be from such a prison, from a tomb under all the others; a place built for such secrecy, that it had baffled for centuries, every attempt at discovery. No, that last fiendish laugh from Arab lips must be the last sound of earth that we would ever hear.

Oh, God, how terrible! That constant march round and round our dismal prison; the pressing of our hands against the stones; eyes weary with the darkness; and hearts heavy with the want of hope! Occasionally, we started back, sick with fear, as our whispers summoned the weird echoes, and we heard the mimicry of our spoken thoughts return to us, as it were from the long dead lips of those stark mummies, who had lain so many centuries in this cold, dark tomb.

There was a well in the centre, a huge black hole plunging down into the bowels of the earth; just such an one as there is in the centre of the Pyramids at Cairo. Without hope we gravitated again and again to its edge, and held our lanterns over, as we peered down into its awful, limitless blackness, and wondered if help would rise to us from its boundless depths. Presently one of our lanterns went out.

This reminded us that the hour approached surely when we would have no light. Like children we huddled together, terrorized through our own helplessness; and we lay down crushed, and quiet, by the side of that unopened coffer, which had lost the history of the mummy it encased.

In time we lapsed into absolute silence. We tacitly knew as hour after hour slipped by, that we should soon be in total darkness, and left without hope of rescue.

There are few, very few, who could possibly realize what such darkness means; or could imagine, the sensation of nameless dread that seizes the heart, and falls like an awful leaden weight upon the senses, and actually crushes one into the ground. What extraordinary visions and delusions pass before one's eyes under such conditions! At times strange lights, resembling coloured fire-flies, dance before the giddy senses, and then come whitish

mists that grew out of the blackness, that took the shape of one's thoughts, that frightened one with distorted forms, absent faces and cherished fancies—that disappear to return—that return but to taunt, to tantalize, and again to vanish.

To add to the horror of the situation we soon began to realize that the temperature of the vault was considerably lower than that of our bodies. Possibly the extreme depression of our spirits affected our circulation; however, by degrees the cold seemed to penetrate and almost freeze the marrow of our bones. And this was not all—soon came the fear that there was yet another affliction in store for us, that would add to the misery of the darkness, to the coldness, to the captivity.

I could notice how terribly the cold seemed to affect our strange companion, as I heard him shudder and felt him shaking violently. I pulled my jacket off

and threw it over him. Presently a slight moan was perceptible, a moan, something so like the one we had heard before, that I grasped the professor's arm. He too had heard it, and was sitting up to listen. Again we heard it slightly, but further off. We reached out to touch our unfortunate companion, but he had gone, and we could hear him creeping farther and farther away into a remote corner to suffer alone.

We had not the heart to light our matches, and drag him from his hiding-place. Instinctively we knew we could do no good, and so we had to lie and listen to the faint moans he unwillingly emitted from time to time. But his agony at last reached its crisis, and we groped our way across the vault, to find the spasm over, and the poor fellow lying exhausted on the stones.

Carefully and gently we raised him, and helped him back to the shelter of that

unknown coffer, that somehow seemed to be our home in that dismal place. We had not alluded at any time to his suffering or its cause, and consequently we were rather surprised, when, of his own free will he commenced in a low voice to relate to us the following story.



CHAPTER VI

PLACING himself against the unopened sarcophagus, in a weak voice he began : “ I feel it is my duty at the present moment, to tell you the cause of my suffering, so that later on, you may more easily understand, that you can do nothing to either help or relieve. There is yet another motive that prompts me to speak—one which you may call a weakness, but a weakness that lurks in the breast of all mankind, namely, the desire to unburden the heart of every secret that has oppressed it, when the end draws near, when the tide of life is on the ebb, when the shoals, and the sands, and the weeds

can no longer be sheltered by the ripples, or hidden by the froth.

“In a few hours I feel certain that my lips will be silent for ever. I am impelled to make this confession by a reason that my story itself will explain, but should it so happen by any extraordinary circumstance that you should yet escape, I ask you as a last act of kindness, to leave my body for ever in this place.

“In order that I may explain to you the strange events—that are as links in the chain of Destiny—that have irresistibly drawn me even into this very tomb, it is necessary that I recount certain circumstances that surrounded both my parents and my own early life.

“My father, Colonel Chanley, at about the time of my birth, commanded a very important garrison in the North of India, close to the frontier of Afghanistan. He had been for a long time in the Indian

service, and was well known and feared by the natives in every quarter of the country. He was a just man, but extremely stern, and severe in his execution of justice. He was rather advanced in life at the time of his marriage, and had been deemed by his friends a confirmed bachelor. It caused considerable comment when he suddenly announced his matrimonial intention, and chose for his bride, the only daughter of his old comrade Major Upham. My mother, who, though young at the time of her marriage, was a woman who had gained considerable experience in garrison life in India, and consequently was well adapted to assume the numerous social functions, that would later on devolve upon her as wife of a commanding officer. Like my father, all her ancestors for generations had been in military service, and like him also, for the most part in connection with Indian affairs. This may

in some way have been responsible for her haughty and imperious bearing towards the natives, but on every possible occasion she took no pains to conceal her personal prejudices. People warned her again and again, of the danger she was running by incurring the hatred of such a race, but, neither warning, nor threat, had the effect of causing a change in her feelings, or could induce her to adopt a more diplomatic attitude. After her marriage, she set herself deliberately to work to banish from the surrounding country, all wonder-workers, miracle-mongers, and such like, and so determined and antagonistic was she in her zeal that she did not confine her task to the more common fakirs, jugglers, and magicians, but went so far as to carry her persecutions against the inoffensive Yogis, and mystics, that are found in so many parts of India.

“There was one, however, who, in spite

of all her efforts, she failed to either affect or dislodge. He was a man of extreme age, a Yogi or Mystic of the highest order, who dwelt far up in the mountains overlooking my father's garrison. This man was believed by the natives to have the extraordinary power of predicting disaster, plague or death, weeks and even months in advance. His appearance in any place or village was at all times responsible for the entire cessation of labour or occupation of any kind. When seen approaching, the entire population would turn out to meet him, and in ominous silence would follow and watch him walk, as it seemed, in a trance, until he reached the centre of the village. Once there, he would pronounce his prediction in a deep, sonorous voice, and as mysteriously disappear to the mountain whence he came.

“On account of the reverence with which he was regarded by the natives, this man

of course should not have been interfered with, but yet at every opportunity my mother did not scruple to talk about the ignorant superstition of the natives, and cited the Yogi's claims to prophesy, as an example of the evil influence of such upon the credulous. And so things went on until within a short time previous to my birth. About the same time there was some trouble expected with the Afridis on the Afghan frontier, and a second regiment of soldiers were sent up to reinforce my father's command. It was a custom well observed in the garrison life in India, that on the arrival of a new regiment, an entertainment and ball were usually given to welcome the strangers to their new quarters, and on this occasion, it being the first entertainment of the kind that my mother had had the opportunity of giving since her marriage, she determined to do everything in her power to make it a

memorable one in the eyes of her guests. Nothing was left undone to emphasize the event. It was arranged that the ball was to be held in the barracks, and the large building and the grounds around were gaily decorated with bunting and flags, until the entire place wore a festive appearance that must have been extremely gratifying to the new-comers.

“ Everything went well, until about the middle of the ball, when a strange, wild figure emerged out of the night, and striding through the ball-room in the middle of the dancers, forced his way up to a dais on which my mother happened to be sitting, and in a deep sonorous voice proclaimed, as the last prediction he was ever destined to utter, that before the night would close, the garrison would be attacked and almost totally destroyed.

“ During the excitement that ensued, the old man might have escaped, had not my

mother pursued him into the very grounds and ordered the guard to place him under arrest.

“Returning to the ball-room, she restored festivities by ridiculing the prediction. The music struck up, and the dancing was resumed.

“Two hours later a small fire was discovered in one of the rooms, but was easily extinguished. A little later, however, the roof was found in flames, and as dancers, musicians, and spectators fled in alarm, the loud blast of a bugle was heard, and before the officers and men had time to even grasp their swords, many were speared, and struck down by a fierce band of Afridis, who, under cover of the darkness of the night, had crept in upon the unsuspecting revellers. For the first few moments, everything was wild confusion, but the soldiers speedily rallied, and after a stubborn fight, lasting for upwards of

two hours, they drove the invaders back to the mountains and restored quiet, but not before a considerable number of the troops were killed and wounded.

“When morning broke, my mother urged an examination of the old man, who, all this time, had been confined in a cell. During his trial, the Yogi did not open his lips—not even when they had searched his habitation in the mountains, and returned with a paper covered with mystical signal, and having inscribed in its centre the exact moment of the attack. He was finally condemned on circumstantial evidence, as being in league with the insurgents, and marched out into the barrack grounds to be shot. I am ashamed to say my mother stood by my father’s side to witness the Yogi’s execution.

“Just before the command to fire was given, stepping forward to the old man, she asked him to confess freely, and fully

the part he had played in the tragedy of the night. Drawing himself up to his full height, he said proudly, 'Madam, I have nothing to confess. Death to Yogis is nothing. We die to live. The crime that you are about to commit will bring its own punishment. As I do not desire to escape my fate, so shall you not be able to escape yours—or shall the child that you will soon bring into the world, escape his—remember! I have spoken. Kill me.'

"As she disdainfully stepped back, the word of command was given, the muskets blazed forth, and the old man fell riddled with bullets. At the same moment, high above the roar of the guns, there rang out an agonizing scream of fright and terror, and my mother fell back fainting into my father's arms. When the smoke had cleared away, it was apparent to everyone that something terrible had occurred to frighten her. Something seemed to have

leaped from the grass and struck her, but what it was, no one seemed to know. 'Something has startled me,' was all the explanation she herself would give, and so they carried her back into the portion of the barracks that had escaped the fire, and she remained there for some months until, owing to her fright, I was prematurely born.

"Such was the story of my birth that I heard when I grew old enough to understand. What had struck or frightened my mother on that terrible morning, I did not find out until years afterwards.

"When she had recovered sufficiently to travel, to the astonishment of all who knew her ambitious nature, she insisted that my father should retire from the army and return to England. And so it was as a child in arms, I was taken from India and reared in the South of England, and for a long time imagined that I had been born in the

quiet little place my father owned in the vales of Devon. It was years afterwards, when I was quite a grown lad, that one evening my father told me this story of my birth. It was, in fact, the last evening we ever spent together, for shortly afterwards I went to college and my father was prevailed upon to accept an important position in the Civil Service and return to India.

“It was only the prospect of a title, some said, that induced my mother to let him return, but, as year after year went by, and still he remained, people wondered that she would not join him; but as she made no secret of her dislike to India, it was put down to that, and so forgotten.

“There were no clouds to mar the brightness of my youth that I can recall. Everyone with whom I came in contact predicted a brilliant career for me. True, in those early days almost everything I

touched or attempted became a success. At college, study was a pleasure, not a task, and honour fell at my feet. My college days ended soon after I had attained my nineteenth year, and I returned home to pass a few months before finally deciding in what direction to turn my attention.

“There was an affectionate letter from my father awaiting me, in which were the glad tidings that in another month he would be on his way to England on a long leave of absence. I was so overjoyed at the news that on the following morning I started to ride into the nearest town to send him a cable message of our congratulations. On my way I had to pass the vicarage, and as I did so I reined up my horse, thinking to wave from the road across the rose garden a friendly salute to the rector. But instead of seeing the venerable rector, a sweet young face

came pushing back the roses to greet me, and as I leaned from my horse to take a fair soft hand in mine, a woman's dark eyes were lifted towards me, and in the glance of recognition that followed, we both felt that the angel of love had for the first time entered the secret chamber of our hearts.

“Yes, the little playmate of my early days had grown to be a woman. And strange to say, she had returned from a school in Germany on the very day that I had returned from College. I had almost forgotten her during all the years I had been away, but the one touch of her hand, the one glance of her eyes, brushed away the cobwebs of memory, and once more Lucy Marsden stood before me—ah, how long ago it seemed! in her little white frock and pink ribbons, as we astonished the rector one morning by solemnly marching up to him and asking to be married.

“But she had grown to be a woman. Her eyes seemed to rebuke me for thinking of her as a child.

“I did not wait to see the rector, and not quite understanding the new feeling in my heart, I took the roses she gave me, and pressing them to my lips, rode away, thinking of other things, I must confess, than the object of my ride.

“The first cloud came on my return home. My mother noticed the roses, and to my astonishment, she appeared sorry that Lucy Marsden had returned. She did all she could to change my feelings towards her, and finally tried to make me promise that I would not see her again. It was the first misunderstanding that had ever arisen between us. From that time, my mother revealed herself to me in her true light. I was shocked, for she tried by the most ingenious pretexts to prevent my visits to the vicarage.

“But Love is an expression of life—greater even than the life that gave it birth. Lucy and I became inseparable. I tried once, as a test to the genuineness and constancy of the sentiment, to tear myself away from her, only to find that I had given her my heart, my soul, every feeling of noble earnestness and love that man ever gave, or, woman ever accepted. And so one night as we wandered in the moonlight amongst the roses of that old Devonshire garden, I told her of my love, my plans, my prospects, and looking up to the stars that were our witnesses, we pledged ourselves for ever, in the sight of the God we both worshipped.

“We were so happy in the few short days that followed, that we dreaded each night, lest the returning morning might bring us sorrow. We almost feared our happiness, for we were but mortal, we knew that nothing mortal could last, and so each

moment brought both fear and gladness in its train.

“I have often wondered since, why God created love, when the price we pay for it is at times even greater than the salvation of the soul. It is a little thing to lose one’s rest hereafter, for the spirit can have no heartache. But to know what love is, and to lose what one has loved, to be compelled to live on and on through moments that are worse than eternities, to have a living body to care for, to clothe, to feed, while within there is a dead heart, is to my mind, a greater penalty by far, than the much paraded agony of the damned.

“But there are so few who have truly ever loved, so that words like these convey meaning to few, very few indeed. People as a rule but want, and desire, and lust to possess—they do not love! They misuse the word, and in their shallowness go to their school books for a meaning of its

sacred sense. But to love truly, to love with heart and soul, with brain and body, is to be God-like, in the only human approach to Divinity—to the pure and faithful it is to create not one thing, but all things—a new Heaven, and a new earth. And in the fulfilment of dreams that be, to see the perfection of dreams to come.

“And it was thus with us. But we were children of earth, governed by the laws of cause and effect—doomed by the folly of others.

“One fatal morning the news came that my father had been killed, by accident. Such things custom calls accident or chance when they are evil, and puts down to the will of God when they are good.

“When my father’s body had finally been laid to rest, in that peaceful churchyard in Devon, I found that the administration of his estate, and capital, lay solely in my mother’s hands, during her life-time, with

the exception of a tea-plantation in India, which he had lately purchased, and had bequeathed to me on my coming of age. My mother lost no time in exercising the legal powers, she was so unexpectedly endowed with to prevent what she pleased to call a *mesalliance*. In vain I pleaded with her. In vain I protested. Come what would my mind was fully made up to marry Lucy, and I would go to the ends of the earth to accomplish my purpose. In her attempts to frustrate me she would not heed my entreaties ; and I soon found I would have to resort to stronger means if I were to keep my resolution.

“ In a few months I would attain my majority, and convinced that my mother determined to have me in her power by selling the property in India before I controlled it, there was nothing left for me but to go to India and endeavour to prevent all action in the matter.

“Not until the morning fixed for my departure for the first time did I tell her of my resolution. Everything was in readiness, the dog-cart had driven round to the door, when I entered her room to say good-bye.

“I had prepared myself for a scene, but certainly not for the tempestuous one that followed. When I told her, she at first simply attempted to dissuade me from going; then in turn she tried entreaties, then threats, and finally as I tore myself from the room, I heard her throw herself on the sofa and sob, ‘Anywhere, anywhere, my boy, but to India!’ There was something in those words that made me hesitate. I stopped and turned back to her; thinking to find her softened, I asked for the last time if she would consent to my marriage. But with the mere mention of the subject she lapsed again into the same hard woman of a moment before; further argument was useless, so saying ‘Good-bye,’ I turned

from the room and without faltering was driven to the station.

“I had said farewell to Lucy the night before. She also had done all in her power to prevent me from going, and it was with a strange feeling of presentiment, and gloom, that I looked from the train in the direction of the vicarage, and saw, or fancied I saw, a white face among the roses at her window, and a little white hand that waved me a last farewell.

“I tried to console myself for leaving her by saying over and over again, that it was for her sake I had to go. ‘I shall want money and position for her,’ I thought; ‘she must have everything the world can give her’—and yet my mother’s words, ‘Anywhere, anywhere, my boy, but India!’ still echoed in my ears and filled me with gloomy presentiments and thoughts, that I tried in vain to banish.

“During the voyage I resolved that so

soon as my business matters were settled, I would pay a flying visit to the place of my birth. I vividly remembered all my father had told me, and I tried to picture in imagination the rugged mountains, and that strange, tragic scene, that occurred before my birth. The desire to go there became irresistible.

“Reaching India, I proceeded to adjust the affairs in connection with the plantation which would be lawfully mine so soon. It was fortunate that such was the case, as it would expedite matters, and enable me to sell the plantation and return to Lucy immediately. But, ah, how little do we know what slaves we are in the hands of that same Destiny, that sent a Napoleon to the throne, and a Judas to destruction!

“Week after week passed, delay after delay came. A drunken soldier struck a sepoy—a riot ensued, and all Government affairs were at a standstill. On another

occasion, by the miswording of a telegram, all transactions were for the time being stopped. All little things—yes, little things!—But alas, so potent! So fatal!

“And so it happened I came of age in India—came of age, an heir to property certainly, but what if I tell you that there was another heritage as well—a heritage for which I had not counted.

“On that morning, when my soul should have been jubilant, I woke as usual, woke to find the heat unbearable, even at that early hour, and as I threw aside the bed covering to relieve my oppression, I noticed a curious throbbing pain, in my left side, which I could not account for.

“Fatigued through pain, I fell asleep again, and dreamt, it seemed to me, the same dream over and over again. I thought my father came into the room; and stooping down, had whispered into my ear:

'The seed that is sowed must be reaped—it matters little by whom. Be patient, there is no law but that of God. Nature and destiny are servants thereto.'

"I woke with the words ringing in my ears, woke, with that horrible gnawing pain, worse than before, and with a terrible fear and dread, of something, that I could not explain, and still less understand. Although my brain was much distraught during the day, I wrote a long letter to Lucy with the semblance of cheerfulness. She had astonished me in her last letter, by informing me, as a piece of news she thought would please me, that my mother had completely changed her attitude towards her, for which she expressed great joy; and that she had been at my mother's house several times, and was going again during the very evening on which she wrote, to talk about the future and me.

“My first thoughts were to prevent such visits. Her simple words filled me with misgivings. But the next moment I could not but feel ashamed of my filial disloyalty, so, I merely answered, that I was indeed surprised, at such a change on the part of my mother, and hoped that nothing would arise to cause her any regret. More I could not lend myself to write on that score, for my whole nature was in rebellion.

“Again and again I read my darling’s letter, and as I paused and pondered over her sweet words, and sweeter thoughts, I was so happy that I forgot my dream, my forebodings of evil, and even the terrible gnawing pain in my side, which during some hours of the day caused me the greatest agony. I consoled myself with the thought that being now of age, I could dispose of the plantation in a short space of time, and return and hear those words of loving tenderness from Lucy’s lips.

Yes, I dreamed to claim her very soon as my wife.

“However, certain legal technicalities had to be gone through, and nearly six months expired before I could finally dispose of the property, and prepare to return.

“During all this time I suffered considerable pain, yet I sought no medical advice. I persuaded myself that it was probably the result of some strain, and that it would be better to wait, and get proper attention, when I returned to London. There was, however, something else that caused me greater anxiety. For a few months back, I had noticed a considerable change in the tone of Lucy’s letters. They became more and more unlike the spontaneous expressions of love, and devotion, that I had at first received. Occasionally there would be one more in the former key, yet I could not but see that some change had

taken place, and my heart grew sick with anxiety as to the cause. Presently word came from the rector that Lucy had been very ill, but, he thought, was getting better, and that there was no need for anxiety, or for my returning before my business was fully settled.

“I longed to take the next steamer, but, as everything was on the eve of conclusion, I was forced to wait, and tried to console myself by counting the hours and days, when I should be able to return to comfort Lucy.

“As a certain transaction, in concluding my business, had called me to within a short distance of the place of my birth; and finding myself after it was attended to free, and compelled to wait a week, before the steamer sailed, I determined to make the trip, as it would probably be the only opportunity I should ever have to do so.

“Alas ! how little do we know what a single step in this or that direction, may bring forth. And yet it is useless to repine. What is to be, will be. I had to go.

“I reached the place, made myself known, and was received with the greatest hospitality by the colonel and the officers at the barracks. As I intended to remain there but a day, on the following morning, accompanied by some of my new friends, I set out to see the various points of interest, such as forts, etc., constructed by my father during his command of the garrison.

“Again I heard the extraordinary story of the old Yogi, who was executed on the morning after the attack on the barracks. For, although years had passed, yet the story went the round of every regiment that was stationed there. Many and strange were the theories advanced as we

rode along, as to what had so frightened my mother, or what my father and she had seen, as the old Yogi fell lifeless to the ground.

“Pulling up his horse as we passed under the ragged edges of a mountain, the colonel pointed upwards to a large cave just above an extraordinary plateau of solid rock, which, he said, had been the habitation of the old Yogi during my father’s command. Jestingly I proposed that we should go there; the colonel took my proposal seriously, but personally declined to make the ascent with the excuse that his ‘bones were too old for the climb.’ The other two officers, however, jumped at the idea, so leaving our horses in the care of the colonel, we began to climb the steep escarpment.

“It was still early morning, and the dew of the night made the rocks and mosses so slippery and dangerous, we were forced

to proceed with the utmost caution. At last we reached the wide rocky plateau facing the mouth of the cave, and for a moment stood enraptured with the magnificence of the view. All nature seemed to have combined to produce a wealth of scenery that could not be surpassed.

“Forest, and plain and mountain deployed around us, and like some grand panorama appeared to change, and grow, and then dissolve with every movement of the eyes. Above our heads, the rugged mountain peak rose into the very heart of heaven, while on every side Time had carved the rocks in strange, fantastic shapes, that would baffle the wildest imagination to describe.

“Stretched out below us we could see the barracks, and the soldiers moving about like busy little ants in the morning sunshine, while on our right lay a white-washed fort flying the English flag, and

with the black nozzles of its cannon like jealous eyes looking across the frontier.

“ ‘It would make a mystic of any man to live here,’ said one of the officers, as he turned towards the cave. ‘And see here, here is food to eat and water to drink.’ And he pointed to where a spring burst forth through the very face of a large rock, surrounded by a perfect garden of edible herbs.

“Inside the cave we found everything as if its inhabitant had left it but an hour before. There was a rude couch in its furthestmost corner, on which the skin of a large tiger was spread, and by its side was a rough set of shelves which contained a variety of books on profound subjects, that completely amazed us. At the extremity, far within, was a large cavity which apparently had been used for a temple. In the centre stood an altar and a stone figure of Siva—the Destroyer—

which from its appearance must have been carved centuries ago. Before the god there still remained the withered stalks of herbs and flowers—probably the old Yogi's last propitiatory offering before that fatal night.

“On a table, rude as the other furniture, placed at the head of the couch, was a copy of the Vedas, an English Bible, and a slab, on which it was evidently the custom of the aged recluse to write down his thoughts. Tremblingly I took up the slab. I seemed to feel that my soul would read its death warrant, yet, I could not help but look.

“The first line was in Hindustani, which I could not decipher. Then came the words in English: ‘No man shall escape his fate—did not even a God die that the scriptures might be fulfilled?’

“‘No man shall escape his fate!’ Strange, I thought, that everywhere I

turn is some warning of this kind accosting me. 'What can it mean?' I cried aloud, forgetful of my companions. In answer came a sigh, so weird, so strange, so audible, that even the soldiers stepped backwards in their fear.

" 'Come away!' exclaimed one. 'This place gives me the shivers, and besides, we can't keep the colonel waiting any longer.' And drawing me along by the arm, they prepared to leave. We had descended but a few steps when I recollected that I had forgotten my whip by the side of the couch, and returned for it, calling to the others not to wait, I would follow.

"Returning from the strong glare of sunshine into the gloom of the cave, for a moment I could not see. When I did, my heart nearly failed me. I became conscious of the apparition of an old man looking at me from the couch, and as my

eyes met his, he pointed with a long, lean finger to those words on the slab, which were still running like quicksilver through my brain.

“A sensation of fear possessed me. I blindly bolted out of the cave, my feet slipped on the rocks and mosses; in vain I clutched at the shrubs, and brambles, in my path. I tried to stop, but something seemed to pursue me. I could see the colonel far away in the path below. I could hear the voices of my companions shouting to me to take care. But my feet were slipping, the stones, mosses, and rocks were sliding from under me. I caught at branches, but they broke; my head was giddy, my senses sick with fear. I heard a huge rock I had dislodged, go crashing downwards into the abyss below, and with a wild scream for help, my body reeled over, and I remember no more.

“When consciousness returned, I found

myself lying in the colonel's rooms in the barracks. They told me I had been there for three days. At first it was feared that the skull had been fractured, but when a thorough examination had been made by the surgeons, they found that together with a deep cut across the skull, the severest injury I had received was a complicated break of the right leg, sufficient to keep me on my back for eight weeks at least. 'But Lucy,' I thought, what of her? What will she think of this delay after all my promises to return?' and as I lay there day after day in agony, my thoughts were always of her, and of how she would bear the disappointment.

"After a long time, I was able to get my letters reforwarded to the garrison. The first one I opened was from the old rector, telling me the cruel news, that again, my darling was ill—so ill that she was unable to write.

“With a great effort, ill as I was, I rose and determined that I would start for England--even if it killed me. I remember that morning well. I had half dressed, when the pain in my side, which I had not felt for some days, returned with double fury. The surgeon came in at this moment, and when I was again placed in bed, he commenced an examination, and, I could see by the puzzled look on his face, that the agony I suffered, was beyond his comprehension. So things went on until the day came when the pain was beyond all endurance, and finally in the evening the flesh opened, and a peculiar growth began to make its appearance. The Army Surgeon from that moment refused to take charge of the case, so my good friend the colonel decided that there was nothing to be done, but to have me immediately removed to the nearest Military Hospital. An ambulance was finally constructed, and

a band of natives engaged to transport me over the rough country to the nearest town. After a painful experience, I reached the hospital.

“The surgeons then held consultation after consultation. They admitted they had never seen anything like it before, but they persisted in calling it a tumour, so as a tumourous growth, with a Latin name, it was finally diagnosed. In spite of all their medical skill, the *thing* grew—I had never called it a tumour; to me it was a *thing*, undefined, horrible, and nameless. By the time the bones of my broken leg were sufficiently knit to travel, *it* had grown out of my side to the length of several inches. To complicate matters, it had grown from the inside, as it were, and had forced back the flesh, like the lips of a wound that it separated and kept apart. From its position between the ribs and the pelvis, the doctors argued that its

proximity to the heart and other vital organs placed all chance of an operation out of the question. Yet hope kept alive within my heart, and looking forward to the superior skill of medical specialists in London, at last with a sigh of relief, I sailed for home.

“But I had not realized the full extent of the calamity that had overtaken me. I had but thought that *it* was some sort of growth of an unusual kind, and I felt certain, in spite of the decision of the hospital surgeons, that I would find some means in London or Paris, of having it removed. But the bliss of ignorance did not last long.

“One evening in the middle of the ocean, I was turning over some of my father’s papers, and finding an old diary of his, written during his command on the Afghan frontier; I took it up on deck and commenced to read. Hour after hour

passed as I perused the hopes, deeds, and dreams of the man who was responsible for my being. It was almost dark when I came to the passage, 'Oh how I should like to have a child—a son who would perpetuate my name.'

"A little later I read, 'I have married—more in order to have a child than to have a wife.'

"And so I read on and on, till I came to the terrible night of the ball, and the execution of the Yogi. 'At last,' I thought, 'I will know what caused my mother the terrible fright that resulted in my premature birth.' And bending over the faded leaves before me, I came to this passage:

"'Oh, my God! What have I done? As the muskets rang out and the Yogi's body sank to the ground, there leaped from the grass at my wife's feet, a hideous black snake, that springing upward with an angry

hiss, struck her on the side, and falling back into the grass, disappeared. Instantly I thought of the last words of the old Yogi. What if they had already come true, before the very breath had left his body! Again I thought of the child—the child I had wished for, had prayed for—the child that was living within her. Oh, my God! what have I done! what have I done! If a crime has been committed—if nature must be avenged, let the punishment, I pray Thee, fall upon me and not upon the child that is unconscious of the sin of the father.’

“I could read no more. The diary slipped from my hands and fell at my feet, but I did not move. My eyes instinctively, as in trouble, looked upward to the sky—but there was no God there for me. The night fell and the stars came out, but no God, no hope for me. The stars wandered on in their appointed courses—they

could not change in their unwritten pathway through the sky—and as I watched them in my despair, again the words of the old Yogi passed before my eyes: ‘No man shall escape his fate—did not a God die, that the scriptures might be fulfilled?’

“How long I sat there I do not know. *The seed that had been sown would have to be gathered.* There could be no doubt now as to what was my fate, and the discovery for the time being utterly unmanned me. A sharp pain in my side recalled me to myself. That pain had a new meaning to it now, which it would require all my fortitude to face. I pressed my teeth into my lips to keep back the cry of agony that rose from my very soul. And so I sat there waiting and fearing, as one would fear the stealthy approach of an invincible enemy.

“Suddenly my whole body grew cold and rigid with terror. There had been a

slight movement in *the thing*—a little tremble—a quiver, but of life. The cold perspiration stood in great beads on my forehead. I could feel my heart cease beating, the blood chilled in my veins, and as I pressed my hands to my face, I shrank from their ice-cold touch.

“But there was a resolution forming in my mind—a thought, that a moment before I should have rejected with disgust. I had never seen *the thing*. I had never dared to look at *it*. Now, I would go to my cabin, and see my enemy, face to face. I reached for my crutches—softly I limped across the deck. It was midnight. Not a sound to disturb the silence of the ocean but the panting of the engines, as they forged their way across the deep.

“The lamp was burning in my state room—a little oil lamp, that gave a sickly yellow light. I took it down, and placing it where I could see well, I opened the

loose silk shirt I wore, and looking into the mirror, one glance was sufficient to show me that my most dreaded fears had been realized.

“Yes, *it* had begun to have life, independent of my life. Oh God! how my senses reeled when I saw the shape *it* had taken, the colour it had assumed. I staggered out of my cabin. I reached the deck, delirious with frenzy, sick with horror. Can you wonder at me, when those who have had some petty grief have put an end to their misery, that I should also at such a moment determine to end my accursed existences. It would be so easy, I thought—and accounted an ‘accident of course.’ Strange even at a moment like that, that one should consider the opinion of the world. And yet I did not think so much of ending my own life. My sole thought was to kill that *thing* and I looked upon my body more as one would look

upon a stone—a stone to weight *it* down and drown *it*, and hold *it* to the depths of the ocean for ever and ever.

“I could so easily slip unnoticed over the side of the vessel, and be swallowed up for ever with my secret stigma. Yet, I dreaded people finding my body, and curious eyes wondering and speculating as to the growth and cause of the *thing*, and I feared too, ay, even more than all—that if I shot or destroyed myself with poison, that *it* might still live—and crawl about like a vampire on the dead body that had generated *it*—but, what matter, what matter, I should be insensible.

“I reached the stern of the boat. Everything was quiet. Learning over I looked down into the fathomless black water, but Lucy’s face reproachfully rose before me, and stopped me—her eyes gazed into mine—her arms held me back—

and frightened at my cowardly intent, I crouched down on deck under the shadow of a life-boat, and lay there till dawn.

“As I had sent no word of my departure from India, when I reached England, instead of going directly home, I went on to London and consulted several medical experts, before venturing to go down to Devon. But there was no hope: surgeon after surgeon examined and failed to diagnose. To kill *the thing* would be to kill me—to let *it* live, would be the same thing in the end. They listened to my story, but the wise men of science would not have believed it if they had not seen and examined *the thing* with their own eyes. Why *it* had not made itself manifest until I was of age, they could not understand, because legal and natural maturity are at variance. They agreed by common consent, in lieu of something better, it was attributable to the intense

heat of India. But the chain of coincidence had been so strong, I knew instinctively that Fate ordained I should go to India. The doctors thought it would be some time before *the thing* would be fully developed, and its fangs might then be extracted, and I would live—but live with *the thing* for ever a companion.

“It was thus with hope completely dead that I returned home. I determined to see Lucy, to bid her good-bye for ever. Renounce my happiness, then go away to some quiet place, and strive to get the courage to end my life, or wait till it was ended for me, but never, never sow the damnable seed for some child to reap the infamy thereof. I racked my brains as to what plausible story I could tell her, as an excuse for leaving her again. I dared not tell her the abhorrent truth—I could not bring myself to do it. I could not seem to invent any subterfuge, so I counted each

moment that brought me nearer to her; most harrassed and uncertain as to the course I should pursue. The train entered the station, and with a heavy heart, I started out upon my mission—a victim branded by an obdurate heredity—a child of cruel Destiny.

“It was summer again. The hedges of the quaint old Devonshire road were full of blossom, and before I reached the vicarage, the perfume of the roses swept past and greeted me, charged with old memories. It was evening as I entered the garden—almost dusk. There was no face peering between the roses now, and so uncared for, and neglected they looked, that my heart almost failed me, for I wondered how long her hands had ceased to tend them.

“The porch was silent and deserted, the door was open, and as no one answered my ring, I entered the hall and stood for a

moment irresolute as to what I should do.

“The drawing room was empty, so was the study. On the desk, under an old-fashioned reading lamp lay the rector’s notes for the following Sunday’s sermon. In a nook of the desk, where the fond father’s eyes could always see it, stood a little portrait of Lucy in the very dress in which I had seen her on that first morning in the garden. I snatched it up and kissed it, kissed it, till the tears rained down my cheeks, and I could scarcely see the picture. And yet, in a few moments I would have to part from her for ever—perhaps break her heart by what I had to tell her!

“At last I heard voices, hushed, subdued voices, upstairs. I hardly know why I ascended. I went up the softly carpeted stairs, and stood for a moment on the landing outside a little room, within which stood a jar full of roses—the roses that I

loved the most. I heard the old rector's voice in prayer, subdued words that I could scarcely catch, and which were every now and then, broken by a sob. I could now and again hear one word—yes, I could hear my name mentioned. Between deep, broken sobs, I heard the old man ask God to forgive me for the cruel deception I had practised. I could hear no more. Softly I entered. Lucy only saw me. In another second she was clasped in my arms, and in a strange faint voice I heard her say, 'Oh, I knew you would come. I did not believe them. They told me you would never return—that you had deserted me. But I knew that you would come back. Thank God! thank God!'

"She sank back, exhausted. The effort of speech had been too much. One look into her eyes told me that I had come too late. The long, lean arms of death had

claimed her—she was his, not mine. Bending close to her I whispered, ‘My darling, I never deserted you. What they told you was false, absolutely false. I love you now, as I have loved you always. You are mine in spite of Fate—in spite of death, Lucy, mine till the end of life, and time, and eternity.’

“A sigh of infinite love, of happiness, and a murmured ‘Thank God,’ and as the shadows of the evening closed in, the end came. And it was well.

“The old rector and I were left alone. From him in a few heart-broken words, I learned the cause of Lucy’s anguish, and all she had suffered during my absence.

“My misguided mother had won her confidence—her love even, and after winning both, prompted by her pride, had crushed Lucy’s heart, by her stories of my unfaithfulness, that rankled in the girl’s devoted

heart to finally kill her. Such was the end.

“And yet, my mother had committed this great sin, she contritely avowed to me that night of mourning, out of the great love she bore me—out of her accursed pride—her love of place and power—out of her jealous, selfish love for me! As she knelt before me sueing for my forgiveness, I scarcely knew what I did, or what I said. I only remember in my frantic revolt, as I tore open my clothing and exposed the *writhing creature*, stirred by my mad passion, she shrank away with fear and loathing from the son of her pride, and without pity, I left her lying there the victim of her own iniquity, and went out into the night alone.

“O God! how I suffered for the days and months that followed. The coldness of the climate caused the *thing* to torture me with agony. I tried to die, aye, many

times, but could not—dared not. Lucy's face would always come before me, her lips between mine and the death that I fain would drink. So, I have lived on, praying for the end; at last, I have not long to wait—it is close at hand. The physicians in London told me that they surmised that, in due course of development, the fangs or poison glands of the *thing* would grow, and all that could be done was to wait until that time, and have them then extracted. In the event of that being done, I might live, they thought, even to the term of mature manhood, of middle age. But such is not to be. A few days ago I noticed that the fangs were nearly ready to do their work—the coldness of this place will hasten matters, that is all. The seed that was sown is nearly gathered. I am not worse than others, for all inherit—some evil desires, some passions, some diseases, that are worse than death. One

thing—I have had the moral courage to resist sowing blighted seeds of heredity. My strength was love for Lucy.

“I came here to live amongst these tombs that I might find the courage to face death. I have gained more, for I have learned a philosophy from my suffering, and from these dead Egyptians that is beyond death, and knows redemption, and promises reincarnation for the soul that has been purified of all that is carnal.

“As for my knowledge of this place, during my rambles among these tombs, I too discovered those strange characters, and one day I was fortunate enough to find the secret of the entrance through which we passed.

“I kept the knowledge to myself, hoping that when death came, he would find me in this place where my body might turn to dust undisturbed, without prying eyes to question with their pitiless curiosity.

“ enstΛ Moryides d. My life soon will be. I do not rebel now. A natural law governs that which seems too often most unnatural. If evil is done, it must be atoned for, let the thoughtless ones of the world remember. If we could know, then we could change, for as the present is the effect of a heretofore cause, so are our present actions the cause of a hereafter effect. But we fain would torture and punish those who would try to lift the veil, forgetting that if we mortals are led ever so dimly, that the smallest light might warn us in advance of dangers that there is no escape from when we are once overwhelmed in their midst.”



CHAPTER VII

THE effect of this terrible story, told in the gruesome surroundings and blackness of the tomb, had, as might be imagined, the most powerful influence on our minds.

As we lay there, we seemed to see that hideous *thing* growing more and more angry every moment, until at last *it* would bury its deadly fangs in the body on which *it* had lived. And yet, strange as it may seem, the tale we had listened to of sorrow and of suffering, and of rebellion, and of noble resistance, had the effect of nullifying our own agony of mind, and our dread for ourselves. Tender sympathy possessed

us. It is ever so in life—there is often an anti-death to real death; the story of another's loss or suffering has sometimes the effect of making us forget our own. The influence of some strong soul going bravely through personal suffering without complaint, enables others more weak oftentimes, to gather the fortitude to endure even greater trials.

In silence we lay there after he had finished. In such a moment, a clasp of the hand expresses more than all the language of the lips . . . I question if either the professor or myself had ever considered this problem of Destiny in such a forcible way. Lamentable as it is, the education of this practical age we live in does not encourage such a vein of thought. We forge ahead in what we call progress, enlightenment, and elevation—why, then should we be occupied with Destiny?

The laws of heredity are studied and

practised in breeding cattle—yet spurned and neglected in human creatures. We mock at them, and cant about the inscrutable laws of God—mark you, not because we are a religious race, but that we may shirk our responsibilities and still be thought to be respectable. And so we live—or rather die—and it is only at our death that we deign to know; therefore, it is only at our death that we are truly alive.

Yet, we boast of our free will, and in our shameless ignorance we reproduce our species, we, who in our full knowledge, through carnal instinct damn, and worse than kill, our degenerate, afflicted progeny.

True, a man can say he is free to turn to the left or right by the action of his will, but in doing so he must not forget that his action is due to the conscious effort, whereas the unconscious is for ever at the wheel of Destiny.

Thoughts such as these trooped in myriads through my mind, in the awful silence that followed the story, as we speechlessly prepared for our own death, from which there seemed no possible escape.

With our last match we lit a pile of linen strips endued with bitumen, and strong smelling unguents, that had once swathed the head of a king's mummy. As the blaze weirdly leaped upwards, we perceived that we had for some unaccountable reason changed our positions, and were facing the entrance of the tomb, and looking towards the desecrated body of the seventh mummy, which had been so placed as if to guard all ingress and exit. We casually noticed that the wrappings had been entirely torn off the mummy's left hand, as it lay outside the broken sarcophagus, almost touching the floor. It was a trifle that distracted our attention

for a moment and nothing more. The blaze would soon be gone. Jealously we turned towards it, believing it was the last gleam of light we would ever see ; and, so we lay there regretfully watching it grow smaller and smaller, until it was finally spent, and there was nothing left, but a ball of fiery embers that glowed amidst the universal darkness. We drew a little apart from one another. There was no farewell spoken. A clasp of the hand was sufficient. The supreme moment was upon us. We waited for death, each man by himself.

It is more than probable that the professor instinctively following his research to the last, had prepared to meet his doom with his eyes looking towards that seventh mummy, that occupied such a commanding position, but whether that was so or not, when the light died out, the old man suddenly startled us with an exclamation of

surprise. In a husky voice he whispered, "See there ! See there !"

Straining our eyes in the apparent direction his voice indicated, we descried a tiny spot of phosphorescent light, about the size of a thumb nail. Before I could move, Chanley had by a superhuman effort dragged himself across the stones and clutched it. In a voice trembling with emotion, he called out to us to fan into a blaze the embers of our exhausted fire. Our matches were all gone—if that little red spark could not be coaxed back to life, it would be impossible to obtain a light. Tearing up the wick of the lantern and fanning, whilst carefully feeding, the shreds to the embers, presently I succeeded in reviving a little glow, then a flickering flame, and with the additional help of some wrappings torn from the nearest mummy, once more a strong blaze shot up and illuminated the place.

In Chanley's hand was a large ring, a band of gold covered with inscriptions that encircled a curious flat stone of a greenish colour. His hands were trembling with nervous excitement, as he tried to examine and decipher the hieroglyphics. In the darkness, the stone was phosphorescent, emitting a pale uncertain shimmer. Placed near the light, it became almost black, and showed white lines that formed a strange-looking hierarchic design upon its surface.

With nervous voice Chanley turned and said, "There may be one chance left. The lines on this extraordinary ring contain a well-drawn plan of the passages radiating to and from this secret tomb, and from it I gather that there may yet be one way of escape open. What I am about to try is merely a venture. This ring tells of notches cut in the left side wall of the well. I will descend and try to find a

passage which, according to this ring, should lead from this tomb to the outer world. Good-bye, comrades, in event some fatality claims me."

Chanley found the notches indicated without much difficulty, but it was with heavy hearts that we watched him disappear into that deep hole that seemed to have no bottom. As the professor had visited the well in the Pyramid of Cheops, and as this one seemed exactly similar, it was with little hope that we could anticipate good results. The well in the Pyramid of Cheops, the professor had often told me, led nowhere, and was simply a source of marvel as to why it had ever been constructed. According to the testimony of the few who had ever attempted to descend, it was of an extraordinary depth, and the bottom was covered by a species of lizard not found elsewhere.

With hearts alternating between hope

and despair, we fanned the blaze and tried to keep it alive, for the gloom of the place was now more terrible than ever. We would occasionally creep on hands and knees to the edge of the well to listen, but always to withdraw disappointed.

Minute followed minute, and still we waited.

We had fed the little beacon fire for the last time, for we were both weak and could do no more. When suddenly a slight sound like a gasp broke upon our ears, and before we had time to question whether it was a trick of our overwrought imagination or reality, Chanley climbed over the edge of the well and dropped exhausted at our feet.

His clothing was torn to tatters, and as he shook the water from his hair in the flickering fire-light I marked the haggard look of his face, and an expression in his eyes that could only have but one meaning. The supreme moment was upon him. His

hour had come. He could scarcely speak. It seemed as if the muscles of his throat were becoming set and hard. "Quick, quick!" he said. "Listen! There are notches down the side of the well—climb down to a ledge of stone that has three passages. Take the left one. Creep on hands and knees till you reach a deep cavern filled with water. Have no fear, dive straight through—it leads to the Nile—it will bring you to safety. Leave me—leave me here."

His head fell back—he tried to smile, but his lips refused to move. The old professor, with tears streaming down his face, tried to raise him, saying as he did so, "You must come, my boy, you must come with us."

His hands meanwhile frantically tore his shirt open. Destiny had indeed been cruel and inexorable to the end. *The thing* was lying there, motionless—it had done

its work—its fangs were buried in his flesh. With a last effort he raised himself; and taking our hands, said softly, “Remember—the seed that was sown is gathered—farewell!”



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